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ABSTRACT

With the growing interest in leadership in teachers and in the debate over whether teacher education programs should foster leadership qualities, this study assessed how senior students enrolled in the College of Education at Marshall University (West Virginia) perceived their own leadership skills. Participants were a random sample of 170 students from a population of 300 enrolled in the summer semester of 1993. Usable data from a mailed questionnaire were received from 119 students. The instrument solicited demographic information, responses to 40 leadership skill statements, and information on the respondent's leadership activities and organizational involvements. Analysis found that 114 of the participants were white, that 79 percent were female, and that 62 percent worked 11-40 hours per week while attending school. Participants appeared to perceive themselves to have greater leadership skills in management of self and understanding others. Statements with the lowest ratings were in the categories of communications, motivating others, inspirational ability, and decision making. These low ratings suggests that communication skills are often too narrowly defined as merely writing and speaking. Except for gender, no other demographic characteristics explained variance. (Contains 26 references.) (JB)

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An Assessment of the Leadership Skills of College of Education Students at Marshall University

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Running Head: PERCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

The primary purpose of this study was to assess the perceived leadership skills of College of Education students. A random sample (n=170) was generated from the list of College of Education senior students enrolled at Marshall University during summer of 1993. The data collection instrument was a two part questionnaire with a reliability of .92 for the 40 leadership statements. Factor analysis reduced the 40 items into 10 factors. College of Education seniors perceived themselves to have greater leadership skills in the areas of Management of Self and Understanding Others. Student personnel administrators having responsibility for leadership development programs should include the leadership skills in which College of Education students perceived themselves to be lowest.

An Assessment of the Leadership Skills of College of Education Students at Marshall University

In an economy dominated by the wrenching pace of technology and vigorous global competition, success goes to those who understand where to go next and how to get there.

When college students leave the classroom to such a volatile work environment, they must be armed with more than occupation specific skills. College students must have skills needed to adapt to change, to be flexible, and to take on new assignments. While companies continue to demand occupational skills, they also require workers with both followership and leadership skills. Career advancement opportunities for the year 2,000 will be greatest for those who have developed, practiced, and refined leadership skills as part of their educational preparation.

Colleges and universities have long acknowledged that student leadership development is a key element in their institutional missions (Bass, 1991; McIntire, 1989; Spitzberg, 1987). Many programs foster leadership through resident assistants or orientation advisors or such positional leaders as officers of student government and Greek organizations (McIntire, 1989). Involvement as a student leader has been

found to enhance development and have long term effects on select skills (Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

College student leadership experiences have also been recognized as stronger predictors of later managerial success than either grades or institutional selectivity (AT & T, 1984). Leadership experiences, for example, have shown to contribute in significant ways to students' growth and development in college (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Kuh, 1992).

Miller (1988) found that students who participate in leadership activities are more likely to possess desirable employee traits: adaptability, alertness, assertiveness, dependability, enterprise, enthusiasm, independence, objectivity, originality, personal integrity, persistence, resourcefulness, self-confidence, tact, and tolerance of stress. Involvement in leadership activities is associated with gains in practical and interpersonal competence (Kuh, 1993), development of leadership skills related later job success (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991); intellectual development (Bauxter, 1992) and development of altruism (Pascarella, Ethington and Smart, 1988).

Posner & Brodsky (1994) identified effective college student

leaders as challenging, inspiring, enabling, modeling, and encouraging. Posner & Brodsky (1994) further revealed that the leadership practices used by female student leaders did not differ from those used by males within equivalent (Greek) student organizations.

McKinley, Birkenholz, and Stewart (1992) found that College of Agriculture junior and senior level college students perceived themselves to have greater leadership skills in areas of *Interpersonal Relations and Management of Self* than in the areas of *Administration and Communication Skills*. Their study also revealed that junior and senior students who were older, female, or members of a foreign language club perceived themselves to have greater interpersonal relation skills.

If student leadership skills are to be developed by College of Education faculty and programs, it is important to know what skills students already possess, how skills and activities students possess relate to leadership, and what the faculty can do to encourage, promote, and facilitate leadership skills. If leadership skills are important, an underlying assumption is that College of Education faculty and administration must either identify, select, and enroll students who already possess leadership skills or develop leadership skills in students enrolled.

Purpose and Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to identify and assess the perceived leadership skills of College of Education students. This study was designed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of senior students enrolled in the College of Education?
2. What are the perceived leadership skills of senior students enrolled in the College of Education?
3. What demographic characteristics account for the variance in perceived leadership skills of College of Education seniors?
4. What leadership activities or organizations were most influential in developing leadership skills of College of Education seniors?

In this study, "leadership skills" are perceptions of leadership, not actual leader behavior. This limitation should be taken into consideration when interpreting or generalizing results of the present study.

Method

The accessible population for this study was senior students enrolled in the College of Education during the Summer semester of 1993

(N=300). A current mailing list was obtained from the College of Education which served as the frame of reference for the study. According to Krejcie & Morgan (1970), a representative sample for a population of 300, within a five percent margin of error, is 170. A random sample (n=170) was generated from the list of College of Education senior students.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The data were collected by a mailed questionnaire adapted from an instrument developed by Schumacher (1990). The questionnaire was field tested with a panel of five College of Education seniors who were not included in the sample, and faculty in the College of Education (Marshall University) to establish content and face validity.

The revised questionnaire consisted of demographic information, 40 skill statements reflecting leadership skills, and a set of standardized leadership activities and organizations.

Participants were asked to indicate their perceived leadership by indicating their level of agreement most descriptive to their feeling toward the statement. Available responses were on a Likert-type scale as follows: 1=strongly disagree; 2=moderately disagree; 3=slightly disagree;

4=slightly agree; 5=moderately agree; and 6=strongly agree. The 40 leadership statements had a reliability coefficient of .92 using Cronbach's alpha as a measure of internal consistency.

After two follow-up efforts, usable data were returned from 70% (119) of the respondents. Non-response error was controlled by comparing early to late respondents as suggested by Miller and Smith (1983). Using a t-test, no significant differences were found between the two groups of respondents. Therefore, it was concluded that the results of this study could be generalized to the target population.

Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaires were analyzed using the SPSS/PC+ Version 4.0 (Norusis/SPSS, Inc., 1990) computer software. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to describe the data. The alpha level was established at .05.

Results and Discussion

The instrument elicited demographic data about students' age, gender, marital status, current residence, ethnicity, and number of hours worked per week while attending college. Table 1 reveals the results of

that information.

Insert Table 1 about here

Ninety five (80%) of the respondents were under 25 years of age. These findings were consistent with the findings of Howley's (1994). Howley's study consisted of College of Education graduates who were surveyed shortly after their date of graduation.

Of the respondents, 94 (79%) were female and 25 (21%) were male. Literature concerning undergraduate women have revealed that women students constitute over half of all enrollments ("The Nation", 1990; Howley, 1994). Developing leadership among women students is therefore receiving increased attention (Sagaria, 1988), especially since extracurricular involvement in leadership activities has been identified as a significant factor in women entering such traditionally male fields such as law (cited in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991).

Over two-thirds (70 %) of the respondents had never been married, 25 % were married, and five percent were divorced. A majority (94%) of the respondents resided off-campus while attending college during their

senior year. The ethnic makeup consisted of 114 whites, 3 Native Americans and 2 African Americans. These data suggest that minorities were underrepresented in this study. Almost two-thirds (62%) of the respondents worked 11-40 hours per week while attending college during their senior year.

Leadership Skills

The second research question of this study sought to determine the perceived leadership skills of senior students enrolled in the College of Education.

Principal components factor analysis with Varimax rotation was used to group the 40 leadership statements in factors. The analysis reduced the 40 items into 10 factors as reported in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

To assist in the interpretation and to reduce subjectivity, only items with factor loadings of .50 or higher were considered for labeling the 10 factors. Factor loadings in this study ranged from .54 to .79, which are considered significant (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Grablowsky, 1979).

The ten factors in this solution were labeled as follows: *Motivating Others, Inspirational, Decision Making, Supervisory Skills, Management of Self, Adaptable, Counseling Skills, Innovative, Understanding Others, and Communication Skills.* Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the 40 leadership statements. The *Motivating Others* items produced a mean factor score of 4.89 with a standard deviation of .60. The other factor means and standard deviations were: *Inspirational* (M = 4.87, SD = 0.75), *Decision Making* (M = 4.88, SD = 0.48), *Supervisory Skills* (M = 5.26, SD = 0.48), *Management of Self* (M = 5.50, SD = 0.48), *Adaptable* (M = 5.26, SD = 0.82), *Innovative* (M = 5.21, SD = 0.52), *Understanding Others* (M = 5.45, SD = 0.39), and *Communication Skills* (M= 4.98, SD = 0.61).

Leadership skills associated with the *Management of Self factor and Understanding Others* factor were perceived to be greater than those associated with the other factors presented in Table 2. The leadership skill statements in the category of *Management of Self* receiving the highest mean score ratings were. *I feel I am proficient in my work; I consider myself to be an achiever in life; and I can work persistently for a just cause.* According to Bellon (1988), "Perhaps the most important

dimension of leadership is the ability to manage one-self - to model healthy, positive, and growth-promoting behaviors, which then tend to elicit those same behaviors from others" (p.29).

The highest mean score ratings in the *Understanding Others category* were: *I like to see conflicts resolved; I understand that others have feelings, motives, goals; I have a good sense of humor; and I willingly listen to others.*

Basic security and survival needs must be met before people can commit themselves to higher levels of performance. As educators, we need to understand others' needs, goals, and beliefs before we can help them develop and apply their best abilities.

One of the most effective ways to learn about students' needs is to talk with them and to actively listen to what they say. Listening to others has important benefits. Listening creates an openness that improves communication and interpersonal relationships, which in turn develops the higher level of trust that is so essential in working relationships (Bellon, 1988).

The *Communications category* had the two lowest mean ratings for leadership skill statements when compared with other categories.

Statements in this category receiving the lowest ratings were: *I feel at ease leading a group; Belonging to organizations is important to me; and I am involved with community affairs.* Other categories with low mean ratings were: *Motivating Others, Inspirational, and Decision Making.* Effective communication is considered to be the cornerstone of the entire leadership process, but all too often, communication is narrowly conceived as the ability to speak or write (Bellon, 1988 p.31).

Variance Associated With Leadership Skills

Stepwise regression procedure revealed that a significant portion of the variance associated with *Management of Self factor and Understanding Others factor* was explained (6.9% and 6.8% respectively) by gender. Females rated themselves higher on *Management of Self factor and Understanding Others factor.* Except gender, none of the other demographic characteristics (age, marital status, current residence, ethnicity, number of hours worked per week while in college) explained a significant portion of the variance associated with the following leadership skills: *Motivating Others, Inspirational, Decision Making, Supervision Skills, Adaptable, Counseling Skills, Innovative, and Communication Skills.*

Although the variance accounted for was found to be statistically significant, the variables were of little practical significance in predicting leadership skills of College of Education seniors. The present study was unable to identify demographic characteristics which could explain a major portion of the variance associated with student leadership skills.

A good way to find out what perceptions are is to ask. People will respond to questions about themselves. In the aggregate, people can define their strengths and weakness when given an instrument that helps them communicate to others. Numerous research studies indicate that participants' self-reports of their leadership are uniformly higher in assessing strengths and lower in assessing weaknesses (Bass, 1991; Luft, 1989; McKinsley, Birkenholz, & Stewart, 1992).

Leadership Activities and Organizations

The fourth research question sought to identify the most influential leadership activities and organizations as perceived by College of Education seniors. Table 3 displays the top 10 leadership activities and organizations as perceived by respondents.

Insert Table 3 about here

Ranked at the top of the Table, with 30 of 119 respondents deeming it to be the most influential was social sororities and fraternities. Burns (1994) reported that Greek organizations are getting the word out that membership can make college memorable. By joining an organization, college students are able to acquire leadership skills and make friends. Many students have revealed that they don't have time to participate in an organization (cited in Burns, 1994). In the present study, 33 of the respondents reported that they did not participate in any leadership activities or organizations during their senior year.

Leadership is an outcome of most student activities (Guida-DiBrito & Batchelor, 1988). Particular attention should focus on the emergent leadership paradigm factors among student members of traditionally volunteer leader organizations, where student affairs professionals develop and educate students for leadership effectiveness (Komives, 1994).

Conclusions

Demographic data in this study suggest the following: a typical College of Education senior is under the age of 25, is a female, is unmarried, not currently living on campus, is white, and is employed 10 or more hours per week while attending college.

College of Education seniors perceived themselves to have greater leadership skills in the areas of *Management of Self and Understanding Others*.

This study was unable to identify demographic characteristics which could explain a major portion of the variance associated with leadership skills. These findings suggest that leadership is complex. There are no simple answers as to what demographic characteristics are associated with high perceptions.

College of Education seniors were more likely to have participated in social sororities and fraternities, church groups, and athletics during their senior year.

Recommendations

College and universities have a vital role to play in the development of future leaders. Student personnel administrators having responsibility for leadership development programs should include the leadership skills in which College of Education students perceived themselves to be lowest.

Students should be encouraged to participate in activities and organizations which develop their communication skills.

Recommendations for Further Research

Research should be undertaken with a larger sample of students to test the stability of factors identified in this study. This sample should include a larger representation of minorities.

Additional research should be conducted to determine the variables that are significant predictors of leadership skills. Knowledge of these variables could be used for modifying leadership programs.

Are senior students in College of Education working in leadership related jobs (part-time/full-time) while attending college? This might be worthwhile investigating.

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Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 119)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20-24	95	80.00
25-29	11	9.00
30-34	3	3.00
35-39	6	5.00
40 and over	4	3.00
	119	100.00
Gender of Students		
Female	94	79.00
Male	25	21.00
	119	100.00
Marital Status		
Married	30	25.00
Never Married	83	70.00
Divorced	6	5.00
	119	100.00
Current Residence		
On Campus	7	6.00
In the Country	22	18.00
In the Town or City	72	61.00
Other	18	15.00
	119	100.00
Ethnicity		
Black	2	2.00
Native American	3	3.00
White	114	95.00
	119	100.00
Number of Hours Worked Per Week While Attending College		
Less than 10 hours	45	38.00
11-20 hours	25	21.00
21-30 hours	23	19.00
31-40 hours	26	22.00
	119	100.00

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations and Factor Loadings for 10 Leadership Factors (n = 119, 40 items)

Factor/Item	*M	SD	Factor Loading
Motivating Others	4.89	0.60	
I can motivate people.	4.93	0.74	0.77
I am able to persuade others to respect my point of view.	4.91	0.76	0.69
Other people accept my ideas.	4.86	0.74	0.67
I am willing to take charge and lead a group.	4.85	0.92	0.72
Inspirational			
I am able to inspire people.	4.87	0.75	0.74
Decision Making	4.88	0.70	
I am an effective decision maker.	4.97	0.93	0.60
Other people accept me as a leader.	4.79	0.86	0.75
Supervisory Skills	5.41	0.48	
Other people depend on me.	5.70	0.57	0.54
People look to me for advice.	5.27	0.76	0.70
I view myself as a professional.	5.25	0.78	0.63
Management of Self	5.50	0.48	
I feel I am proficient in my work.	5.52	0.62	0.66
I consider myself to be an achiever in life.	5.51	0.67	0.78
I can work persistently for a just cause.	5.50	0.60	0.62
I am enthused about my work.	5.42	0.77	0.60
I stay with a project until it is completed.	5.49	0.69	0.60
I enjoy success and strive for it.	5.39	0.71	0.67
Each year brings me closer to my professional goal.	5.25	0.78	0.66
Adaptable			
I consider myself to be a flexible person.	5.26	0.89	0.64
Counseling Skills			
People seek guidance from me during difficult times.	5.2	0.82	0.74
Innovative	5.21	0.52	
I believe that my ideas are practical in nature.	5.27	0.67	0.56
I am original in my ideas and activities.	5.14	0.71	0.71

Table 2 (continued)

Factor/Item	*M	SD	Factor Loading
Understanding Others	5.45	0.39	
I like to see conflicts resolved.	5.82	0.40	0.61
I understand that others have feelings, motives, goals.	5.72	0.53	0.71
I have a good sense of humor.	5.61	0.59	0.61
I willingly listen to others.	5.61	0.58	0.62
I am a cordial person.	5.33	0.72	0.62
I feel people respect and admire me for the person I am.	5.30	0.75	0.67
It is easy for me to develop an interest in people.	5.27	0.87	0.75
I can see both sides of an argument in question.	5.24	0.88	0.59
I consider myself to be tactful.	5.13	0.86	0.58
Communication Skills	4.98	0.61	
I like to maintain good interpersonal relations.	5.54	0.69	0.65
I enjoy sharing information with others.	5.53	0.67	0.78
I enjoy meeting new people.	5.41	0.90	0.79
Making friends/getting along with others is easy for me.	5.28	0.98	0.72
I enjoy expressing my ideas on given issues.	5.12	0.89	0.69
I encourage others to become involved in various projects.	4.98	0.92	0.58
I feel confident about openly promoting issues.	4.80	0.95	0.71
I feel at ease leading a group.	4.67	1.14	0.68
Belonging to organizations is important to me.	4.26	1.33	0.75
I am involved with community affairs.	4.26	1.16	0.62

* Scale:
Strongly Disagree = 1
Moderately Disagree = 2
Slightly Disagree = 3
Slightly Agree = 4
Moderately Agree = 5
Strongly Agree = 6

Table 3
Top 10 Leadership Activities and Organizations as Perceived by College of Education Seniors (n = 119)

Rank	Leadership Activity/Organization	Frequency	Percent
1	Social Sororities and Fraternities	30	25.2
2	Church Groups	27	22.7
3	Athletics	18	15.1
4	Intramurals	15	12.6
4	Community Organizations	15	12.6
6	Student Council for Exceptional Children	9	7.6
7	Band	6	5 0
8	Resident Assistant	5	4.2
9	Environmental Groups	3	2.5
10	National Student Speech Language	2	1.7

Note. Percents do not total 100 because of multiple responses.